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San Martin, Pablo

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**THE CRISIS OF FRANCOISM AND
THE EMERGENCE OF AN ASTURIAN NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY**

by

Pablo San Martin



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SPIRIT

Aalborg University

Fibigerstraede 2

Dk-9220 Aalborg OE, Denmark

Phone + 45 96 35 71 95

Fax + 45 98 15 11 26

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THE CRISIS OF FRANCOISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF AN ASTURIAN NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

Pablo San Martín

University of the Basque Country, Spain

The end of Francoism opened a new period in contemporary Spanish politics. The right-wing discourses that had been hegemonic since the 1940s collapsed toward the beginning of the 1970s, giving rise to the emergence of several peripheral nationalist ideologies that would challenge both the very base of Spanish identity and the nascent Federal State. Mainstream literature on the subject tends to explain these processes by focussing on a collection of socio-economic and cultural factors as well as the new political opportunity structure opened up with the defeat of the dictatorial regime. In this paper, I argue that a Political Discourse Theory perspective, based mainly in the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, can be immensely revealing when trying to account for the emergence of these ideological discourses, and especially for the Asturian Nationalist Ideology that will be our particular "crucial case study" (Eckstein, 1975)¹.

However, before dealing with the Asturian case², let me point out some previous – and necessary – remarks. The Slovenian Lacanian author Slavoj Žižek (Lacanian theory, especially in its Žižekian reformulation, will be the other of my main references) talks about three necessary

¹ In the same way as Aletta Norval (1996) selects the case of South Africa and David Campbell (1998) the case of Bosnia in order to explore and understand more general logics of ethnic identification and identity formation, I also stress the *exemplary status* of the Asturian case as a "crucial case study" that could "score a clean knockout over a theory" (Eckstein, 1975: 127. Quoted in Howarth, 2000: 138).

² Asturias is one of the current 17 Spanish Autonomous Communities. Located in Northwest Spain and with more than one million inhabitants – nearly half out of which speak a vernacular language called Asturian or Bable (Llera, 1994) – Asturias is constitutionally defined as a "Historical Community" and has a medium-sized level of self-government within the Spanish (Asymmetrical) Federal System. Although most academics would agree that "regional identity" and "regional attitudes" are very strong in Asturias, the Asturian Nationalist Movement is a weak peripheral movement in comparison to others such as the Galician, Basque or Catalan. In electoral terms, it remains marginal within the political system and is divided in several political parties: Asturianist Party, Asturian Left, Asturian Nationalist Left and Asturian Unity (San Martín, 1999). However, the Asturian Nationalist Movement has gained social relevance during the last decade, especially in its most "cultural" manifestations such as folk music, literature, traditional sports, etc. It has also become the most active social movement in the region, developing relatively successful campaigns (mainly in defence of Asturian language) and introducing many of its demands in the so-called Asturian political agenda.

stages in the acceptance of a new theory (1991: 2-3). First, it is dismissed as pure nonsense. Second, someone claims that 'well, the new theory, although interesting, ultimately just puts into new words things already said elsewhere'. Finally, the new theory is suddenly and quickly recognised in all its novelty. In a similar way to Žižek – regarding the reception of Lacanian Theory – we can apply this logic to the reception of Political Discourse Theory and other discursive-oriented theories: (1) 'That discursive emphasis...discourse, discourse, discourse! Everything is discourse, everything is text, everything words. It denies the very existence of the world, of objects...it is nonsense!' (2) 'Well, what the growing interest in the discursive dimensions implies it is not so new. It is just a renewed interest, maybe a little bit exaggerated, on some issues that were always present in the Western philosophical reflection' (3) 'Of course, I accept and I affirm the centrality of discourse' (because I am threatened by the possibility of being accused of essentialism and objectivism). Regarding the studies on nationalism this third phase would be something like: 'Of course, nations are constructed, are imagined communities', quoting the magic Anderson's words (1991). However, I have the impression that there is a problem with these sorts of 'confessions'; most of the time they are made because of fear, fear of being accused (but not being really convinced). And the result is that this explicit acceptance is not translated into the acceptance of the radical consequences that it implies at a theoretical, methodological and empirical level. In other words, it is not 'put to work'. It seems that we can't stand a new logic that could lead us too far away, to some really dangerous place; toward the unknown. As pointed out by Zigmunt Bauman, what really disturb us is the breakdown of the predetermined directions, the ambivalence generated by the questioning of the existing categories, the collapse of the order with which we organise our reality, the lack of knowledge of the final result (1991). "There are friends and there are enemies. And there are *strangers*". We don't know exactly what the strangers are, and they are, because of this very reason, the ones that really threatens our social reality, our world, our *compleat mappa mundi* organised in two complementary camps "which consume all differences and hence leaves nothing outside itself" (Bauman, 1991: 53-55). In this paper, I could try to address, in advance, some of the critics that one usually receives when using a discourse theoretical – and for many *strange* – perspective (1. 'it denies the existence of objects, it is nonsense. 2. 'it is nothing new: what the hell is 'dislocation'? It is only a medical and snob metaphor of the classic concept of crisis'). However, and in the same way as Žižek, I will depart from the logic of 're-cognition' of new theories. I am

simply going to *put to work* my theoretical apparatus. And I will do it from the very beginning; in an open way, doing theory at the same time at which we use it, without attempting to predetermine the point of arrival (in other words, without testing anything against empirical reality). This is a discursive reading of the emergence of the Asturian Nationalist Ideology; a discursive reading, without apologies.

The questions that guide this paper are: when did the Asturian Nationalist Ideology emerge³? What is the background against which the need for a new discourse emerges? What are the factors with which we can account for this emergence? The basic idea I will try to demonstrate is that the emergence of Asturian Nationalist Ideology was due to a void created by the dislocation of the previously hegemonic idea of a unitary and homogeneous Spanish community that took place at the end of the Francoist Dictatorship.

The main concept in our argument is thus **Dislocation**. Founded on an ontological framework (that stresses the radical negativity inherent to human experience), the concept of Dislocation accounts for the moment of destabilisation, failure and subversion of a given discourse, as a result of the emergence of some events that cannot be integrated in the system of representation sustaining that particular discourse. It is a traumatic situation of crisis and rupture in which the field of social objectivity is threatened by the encounter with its own incompleteness, with its own immanent impossibility. There is thus a direct relation with the Lacanian *Real*; an excessive element that always escapes any attempt of representation, confronting us dramatically not with what we are but with what we are not. In a broad sense, the Lacanian *Real* would be a sort of "hard kernel resisting symbolisation, dialectization, persisting in its place, always returning to it"; "a cause which in itself does not exist – which is present only in a series of effects, but always in a distorted, displaced way" (Žižek, 1989: 161-163). In other words, the *Real* would be what *prevents us from being*. And what prevents a society, a nation, an ethnic group, etc., from being what they claim to be, is the force of dislocation. Without positive

³ Although it is not dealt with in this article, the very basic question of whether or not nationalism is an ideology may be a matter of some confusion and controversy – as shown by Freedman (1998: 748-765) – that would require some attention. Here we understand the concept of ideology in a broad sense “as encompassing all meaningful constructions through which social reality is produced, and our action within it – especially our political action – acquires cause and direction”, involving a constitutive non-recognition or mis-recognition of the contingent and precarious character of all discursive constructions (Stavrakakis, 2000: 101). See also Laclau (1996), Stavrakakis (1997), Daly (1999). For an overview on different contemporary approaches to the study of ideology (morphological, post-Marxist, Lacanian and false-consciousness-based), see Norval (2000).

content in themselves, dislocations have a dual character. On the one hand, they threaten and destroy identities, social imaginaries and ideological discourses. But on the other, they generate the desire and the need of a re-articulation⁴ of the dislocated discourses, in search of a new fantasy⁵ of closure that would re-suture the (constitutive) lack it made visible (Laclau, 1990: 39-45. Stavrakakis, 2000:100. Howarth, 2000: 109. Torfing, 1999: 128-131).

The ontological framework, as I have just said, is negative. But what do we mean by 'negative'? It means that, as Laclau points out, "[t]o understand social reality, then, is not to understand what society *is*, what *prevents it from being*" (Laclau, 1990: 44). Let me illustrate this with an example that Žižek uses in two of his books (1989, 1991). It is a well-known joke about a Jew, called Ravinovitch, who wants to emigrate from the Soviet Union. The bureaucrat at the immigration office asks him why. Ravinovitch answers: "There are two reasons. First, I'm afraid that the Communists will lose power and the new forces will blame the Jews for the Communists' crimes..." "But", interrupts the bureaucrat, "this is nonsense, the power of the Communists will last forever!", "Well", responds Ravinovitch, "that's my second reason". After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the joke can be rearticulated, maintaining the same logic. "There are two reasons. The first one is that I know that Communism in Russia will last forever, and that panorama is unbearable for me..." "But", says the immigration officer, "That's pure nonsense, Communism is disintegrating all around, and the ones responsible for the Communist crimes will be punished!". And Ravinovitch then responds, "that's exactly my second reason" (Žižek, 1991: 1). Here we can see negativity at work. The Jew, identifies himself with 'what prevents from being', with the antagonistic other that subverts our social reality. Hilariously, he seems to say to us 'I am nothing but the Other, the Other that threatens you, the Other that blocks your identity'. Then, he renounces to a positive definition of his own identity: 'I am what they attempt to eliminate'. The

⁴ According to Laclau and Mouffe articulation will be "any practice establishing a relation among elements [through the construction of nodal points/master signifiers which partially fix meaning] such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 105).

⁵ "[F]antasy is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance. The thesis of Laclau and Mouffe that "society doesn't exist [...]" implies that every process of identification conferring on us a fixed socio-symbolic identity is ultimately doomed to fail. The function of the ideological fantasy is to mask this inconsistency, the fact that "Society doesn't exist" and thus to compensate us for the failed identification" (Žižek, 1989: 126-127). Then, fantasy exists only as a (non-cynical) negation of the real, as a promise of an impossible fullness (that can be only sustained through the attribution of the non-domesticable force of the real to the presence of an external impediment – an enemy). See also Žižek (1996: 77-85).

reverse of that is of course that 'they are nothing but what I prevent from being'. Thus the Jew will be what constitutes the very *sinthome* of antisemitism.

Let me return to the Asturian case. I have located the idea of dislocation at the very centre of my research strategy. Yet, these ideas lead us to another question that requires some previous attention, and that will be our next point of departure. Assuming for a while that Asturian nationalist discourse is a *montage* of certain moments around a master signifier that emerges due to the dislocation of some previous discourses, how can we account for the moments that this new articulation comprises? Are they new – due to the impact of dislocation – or did they exist before acquiring their current Asturianist connotation? Does this mean that they are creations *ex-nihilo*? In other words, what are the 'limits' of the new discursive articulation/s? Are there any 'limit' at all? As formulated by Laclau, "So what are those limits that are other than aprioristic?". His answer is:

the ensemble of sedimented practices constituting the normative framework of a certain society. This framework can experience deep dislocations requiring drastic recompositions, but it never disappears to the point of requiring an act of *total* refoundation. (Laclau, 2000: 82)

Laclau gives then the example of Antonio Conselheiro: "a millenarian preacher [that] had wandered for decades in the brasilian *sertao*, at the end of the nineteenth century, without recruiting too many followers" (Laclau, 2000: 82). The situation changed radically with the transition from Empire to republic, which brought about sudden economic, political and social alterations that dislocated the traditional way of life in the rural areas.

One day Conselheiro arrived in a village where people were rioting against the tax collectors, and pronounced the words which become the key equivalence of his profetic discourse: 'The Republic is the Antichrist'. From that point onwards his discourse provided a surface of inscription for all forms of rural discontent, and became the starting point of a mass rebellion which took several years for the government to defeat. (Laclau, 2000: 83)

On the one hand, the incarnation of God and Evil in the signifiers Empire and Republic was not predetermined aprioristically. It was a contingent and radical decision, possible because it was the only discourse available addressing the discontent of the rural villagers in that particular situation. But, on the other hand, it was possible because it did not "clashed with important unshakeable beliefs of the rural masses" (Laclau, 2000: 83). Thus,

[T]he subject who takes the decision is only *partially* a subject; he is also a background of sedimented practices organising a normative framework which operates as a limitation on the horizon of options. (Laclau, 2000: 83)

Therefore it is necessary to introduce a radical contextualization in the analysis of the emergence of a certain *decision* (an act of discursive articulation based on no a priori principle external to itself). We should pay attention not only to the moment of dislocation and its productive effects (in other words, to 'the Political' *par excellence*), but also to the sedimented practices organising the (dislocated) normative framework and the prior discursive materials that are available for the new articulation (in other words, to 'politics').⁶

Thus, the point of departure of our story will be 1945, six years after the triumph of Francoism and thirteen years before the emergence of Asturian nationalism. This year saw the creation of the Institute of Asturian Studies (IAS), a new cultural institution that officially recovered the legacy of the former Asturianist organisations (San Martín, 1998). However, its discourse, integrated in what might be called the 'official culture of the Regime' (with its fascist, totalitarian, religious and nationalist components), introduced a shift in the 'Asturian studies', avoiding any political connotation and interpreting the differential cultural materials of Asturias as mere "particularities" inside an imagined Spanish Culture (Uría, 1984).

The "academic" movement that developed around the IAS is what I call Francoist Particularism (San Martín, 2001). Their works created a large corpus of materials on the Asturian cultural – and historical – particularities, mainly folklore and language. This "exaltation" of the regional particularities under the shadow of Francoism even generated a reformulation of Asturian racism. Its most vehement exponent was the radical fascist Gimenez-Caballero. He stressed the Arian roots of a sort of Asturian Celtic race (a Hallstat's race), historically involved in a racial war against the "dark" African races of the south (Giménez-Caballero, 1945: 12-15). These arguments, although different, were not alien to a highly popular historical narrative that seeks in the Asturian resistance towards the Romans and the Moors the essence of an unpolluted Spanishness – or Asturianess; what some authors have called the *Myth of Covadonguism* (García

⁶ According to Laclau, 'the Political' will be "the moment of pure antagonism where the undecidable nature of the alternatives and their resolution through power relations becomes fully visible", in opposition to 'the social' which will be the field of sedimented forms of "objectivity" (Laclau, 1990: 35). In a more Lacanian vocabulary 'the Political' will be the moment in which we experience an encounter with the real, the moment that "marks the gap between one socio-political identification and the creation of the desire for a new one" (Stavrakakis, 1999: 75), while 'politics' will be the "antagonist fights as they take place in reality" (Žižek, 1990: 252-253).

and Vega, 1994. Iglesias, 1995. Sánchez-Vicente, 1997). This highly effective myth, which constructs Asturias as a historical subject, while at the same time dissolves it progressively into a broader Spanish identity, was developed by the IAS and other Francoist institutions as a sort of master signifier of an official Asturian history.

Yet, as I have already pointed out, a core part of the IAS' studies focussed on the Asturian language. On one side, language received a lot of attention, being an important 'subject' of study, but on the other, it was characterised as a dialect of Spanish, that is to say, dissolved into a broader entity, being presented as one of its internal moments, without essence in itself. In any case, during those years a large amount of research on the Asturian language was produced: a total number of 202 published studies (Brugos, 1995: 37-39). Besides, more than one hundred literary works in Asturian were also published – a mean of nearly 3 per year –, a highly surprising amount if we take into account the (apparently stronger) repression against regional languages (Uría, 1984: 147).

The explanation usually given is that Asturian was not a dangerous language for the Regime (Brugos, 1995: 36-37. Uría, 1984: 146-150). It was already a degraded rural language, divided in several dialects and nearly without significant written tradition. Furthermore, the total weakness of Asturian regionalism made unthinkable its consideration as an appropriate vehicle for transmitting regionalist or nationalist ideas. It seems that the Francoist political elite considered it as an already dead language, as a vestige of the past, a mere curiosity for the enjoyment of researchers.

This climate allowed the emergence during the 1950s of a new group of Asturian poets (devoted to the exaltation of the rural life). This collective, whose ideological discourse on the linguistic issue coincided, in general terms, with the official one, developed some curious initiatives. In 1968 one of its members founded the association Friends of the Bable (FB) concerned with the promotion of what they called the 'traditional literary uses of the Asturian' (rural and festive poetry). In 1972, FB planned a Regional Congress of the Bable in order to discuss and elaborate some strategies for the future. And the meeting functioned as a point of inflexion that they never could have guessed. In fact, it can be considered to some extent as the 'founding moment' of Asturian Nationalism, something really far from their original objectives. But I will return to this later. Let me stop now in the paradoxical relation of Francoist ideology toward Asturian language (and in general toward Asturian culture).

According to Daly, "All ideology involves a fundamental phantasmatic endeavour to translate the impossibility of society into the theft of society" (Daly, 1999: 219). The desired horizon of closure can only be attempted by producing at the same time a certain 'threat' to that closure, a threat that is bound up with fantasies about the supposed loss and recovery of enjoyment. This is the paradox of ideology, of nationalist ideology in our case: while on the one hand it presents the object of communitarian national fullness as attainable, on the other it endeavours to sustain a critical distance in order to avoid any direct encounter with it (since it would mean an encounter with its own inherent impossibility). Nationalist ideology constructs its fantasy of a realisable fullness through a particular stress on an 'Other' that denies our access to this fullness. The paradox of the Nation-Thing – as *jouissance*⁷ – is that it appears as something accessible only for us, which 'they' can never grasp; and at the same time as something that it is constantly threatened by this Other. Žižek has pointed out that what we conceal by imputing to the Other this theft of (our) enjoyment is precisely the traumatic fact that "*we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us*" (Žižek, 1993: 203). Nationalist ideology is driven by the necessity to avoid the horrifying and traumatic condition of lack in the Real, or in other words, to escape from our encounter with the impossibility of attaining communitary closure.

One of the paradoxes of the ideological fantasy of Francoism was that its success depended to a quite substantial extent on its ability to represent its non-realizability as an external (non-inherent) impediment. In other words, on its ability to construct an Other that had stolen its enjoyment, the enjoyment that it never possessed. The communists, the masons, or the 'peripheral separatists' (the gallery of Others can be large) were made responsible for the immanent blockage of a Spanish Nation, which 'if only the they were eliminated could it be totally itself'. The discursive process of identity construction relied as well in this attempt to avoid the blockage of an imagined Spanish full identity, through an externalisation of the Other - that threatens our identity - via the construction of political frontiers. On the external side of this frontier there would be a set of equivalent others organised around the master signifier of 'Enemies of the Nation', a pure Otherness in its more radical sense. One of the main components of Francoist nationalist fantasy was the existence of a homogeneous ethnic Spain, essentially defined by a set

⁷ The Lacanian concept of *jouissance* means, in a broad sense, enjoyment: a real enjoyment located beyond the 'legitimate' (socially sanctioned and politically correct) principle of pleasure and impossible to be integrated in the symbolic order. It is an impossible/prohibited/lost enjoyment, which as such

of objective characteristics such as language and culture, by the presence of an organic and primordial Spanish way of enjoyment. The Otherness that prevented it from being totally itself was, crucially, the wide category of 'peripheral separatism'. And here is where the issue of Asturian language played a central role. As has already been noted, Asturian was considered a nearly dead vestige from the past, not really dangerous for the Regime. It was in this sense a perfect 'Other' in order to symbolise the immanent blockage of Spanish ethnic identity without producing an excessive threat to it. The presence of Catalan, Basque and, to a lesser extent, Galician (languages that had constituted and still constituted nodal points in the ethnic articulations of these significant peripheral movements) caused a non-domesticable anxiety for the identitarian discourse of the Regime. Asturian language, on the contrary, served as a sort of scapegoat to represent that something was still missing, that the desired full homogeneity was not totally achievable yet, but that it would be possible as long as residual heterogeneity was eliminated. If Francoist strategy concerning with Catalan or Basque was that of an execution (of an attempt to execute, at least in theory), with Asturian it was that of torture.

The punishment of the sloth by John Doe in David Fincher's film *Seven* can be a good example of that (Daly, 1999: 229). On the contrary to the other victims, the sloth is immobilised on a bed for an entire year, being tortured daily but kept alive in order to maximise his pain and trauma. It is a sort of official torture concerned not with obtaining information, but rather with the control of the (his) excessive enjoyment, the enjoyment we imagined that threatens our own (inaccessible) way of *jouissance*. Doe does not directly kill this victim; he reduces him to an apparent dead corpse, an infrahuman being finally abandoned to die under the horrified gaze of the detectives and the doctors. Asturian was also kept alive – through the administration of some calculated permissiveness – maintained as a quasi-dead corpse that would not embody for any longer any sinful excess, like a living example of the only possible 'way out' for the enemies of the nation. The success of this operation depended to a large extent on the ability of Francoist policies to manage the distance between death and life. In other words, in the ability to put it to death without totally killing it, that is to say, to keep it alive without allowing it to exercise its living functions. And perhaps the control of that distance was what failed.

constitutes the very object of our most intimate desire (so that, while in one way it animates the subject, in the other it threatens to destroy him). See Evans (1996: 91-92) and Stavrakakis (1999: 40-70).

Let me return now to the I Regional Congress of the Bable, celebrated at the end of 1973. Among the participants, besides the members of Friends of the Bable, the Institute of Asturian Studies and the old elites of the University of Oviedo, there was a group of young students and lecturers that would play a central role in the coming political history. The reading they started to develop regarding the situation of Asturian language was completely different, opposite in fact, from the one of the Francoist particularists. While the latter were looking for a formula to keep alive for some more time the inert corpse of Asturian language, the formers wanted it to 'stand up and walk'. The disagreement, the questioning of the official discourse, became for the first time visible. To some extent, we can already speak of a dislocatory event of a particular moment when the Francoist ethnic dream faced the existence of an antagonistic Other. Six months after that conference three of those young lecturers founded the nationalist association *Conceyu Bable*. This happened one year before the death of Franco.

The word most used by analysts in order to characterise those final years of Francoism is 'crisis'. The year 1969 was, in the words of the historian Paul Preston, “a dramatic turning point in the History of Franco regime”, due to the overlapping of a series of critical events (Preston, 1986: 18). ETA had killed for the first time one year before. The Matesa scandal had put into the open the virulent inter-family rivalry hidden until then. But, more importantly, it was the year when “Franco recognized his own growing incapacity, handed over the effective reins of government to Carrero Blanco and confirmed the succession of Prince Juan Carlos” (Preston, 1986: 18). If there was a point of agreement between loyalist and opponents to the Regime it was that Francoism without Franco could not be easily maintained. Francoism was a system whose internal equilibrium depended always in the last instance on the reign of the General over all the internal sub-groups. Yet the cession of effective power to Admiral Carrero Blanco opened a period of a controllable uncertainty for the dictatorship. A majority of Francoist families saw the Admiral as the best guarantor of the policy of *continuism* after Franco. However, in 1973, when the show-trial 1001 against ten activist of a clandestine union was starting, ETA assassinated Carrero. Three years before, the beginning of Carrero's era had also coincided with another big show-trial, the Burgos Process against a group of ETA activists. Three of them were found guilty of two capital charges and sentenced to death twice. In a context of great controversy – also between the Regime's families – Franco had to decide whether to implement the sentences or not. His final decision was to show the darkest side of the dictatorship and the nationalist militants

were executed. Contrary to the obscure post-war period where people could simply disappear in the night, this was a public performance (orchestrated while demonstrations of extreme-right activists outside the Court demanded blood). Then, the Francoist fantasy of a national consensus was dramatically revealed as an unfulfilled project that had nearly nothing else than a weak and pathetic dark side (see Žižek, 1999: 27). A majority of Francoist politicians acknowledged then the inevitable collapse of the dictatorship. Three years later, a year after the death of General Franco, the Francoist Courts approved a Law for the Political Reform that most commentators interpreted as its own and definitive *hara-kiri*.

The main conclusion of what has been articulated here is that these final years of Francoism were the sign of a deep crisis. A crisis neither reduced to any particular sphere of the social nor of a cyclical type, but rather an organic crisis that affected all domains of Spanish society (leading to the collapse of dominant discourses). Most accounts converge on that. However, what is important – although usually does not receive much attention – is not the crisis as an 'objective' event, but its discursive construction as such. Rafael del Aguila has pointed out, with reference to the Spanish Transition, how the concepts of 'crisis' and 'conflict' occupied the centre of all political debates (Del Aguila, 1984). From the communists to the liberals or Christian democrats, all introduced these signifiers at the core of their readings of the situation, although the signifieds were different in each case. From very different points of view, the image of the old Francoist paradigm as a dislocated structure was general in the whole political spectrum.

This seems to correspond to the second moment of what the American literary critic William Boelhower calls 'ethnic trilogies'; trilogies written by 'migrant authors' at the beginning of the 20th century (Boelhower, 1991). There are three moments in these trilogies. The first, in which everything is harmonious, the moment of the migrant dream of a new world. The second, governed by conflict, is the Deconstructive moment, when the foundational coherence of the migrant parents is revealed as impossible. It corresponds to the moment in which the Francoist fantasy is dramatically revealed as an unfulfilled project that through a succession of acts of verification (encounters with the Real) ends up crashing on its own inherent limits. The (apparent) sense of totality peculiar to the first paradigm, in which the hegemonic discourse of the Regime seemed to manage the 'war of meaning', had been lost. The emerging narrative logic of final Francoism was then ruled by the conflict. This conflict is exemplified in the trilogies by

the tension between father and son that takes place in a constraining environment (a topology of overlapping crises). A constraining environment that defines the essence of the main novel's characters (the sons) as that of an impossible being. The third moment in these trilogies, was the one in which the principle of coherence is (re)covered, inscribing the 'ineradicable discontinuities' into a new ordering principle of circular closure. The sons try then to create a narrative of order out of the disorder that marks the second moment as a moment of conflict.

Yet, why this search of the sons for a principle of *order*? And what was the nature of that constraining environment if what they tried to achieve was to put 'the real between the parenthesis of project and memory'? Isn't it the collapse of the hegemonic discourse of the founder fathers a breakdown of the connection between memory and project (future) that organised the experience of the social that needs to be reconstructed? The 'walls' that metaphorically constrained the main character's life in the second Cournos's novel, entitled *The Wall*, did not describe a chaotic world without order, but rather a world of possibilities (or maybe impossibilities?) in which he does not know how to reach the right 'way out'. The situation of this second paradigm tends to complicate the original determined project. Boelhower quotes a clarifying passage from *Summer in Williamsburg* (Boelhower, 1991:168. Emphasis added):

Philip walked down the street clinging close to the tenement houses for the shade. If you would really discover the reason, you must pick Williamsburg into pieces until you have them all spread out in your table, a dictionary of Williamsburg. *And then select. Pick and discard.* Take, with intelligence you have not and with patience that would consume a number of lifetimes, the different aspects that are pertinent. *Collect and then analyze. Collect and then analyze.*

Select, pick, discard, collect and analyse. Decide and classify. It seems that what really disturbs is the ambiguity and indetermination that the dislocation of the hegemonic discourses produces (in the lines of what I said about the *strangers* at the beginning of this paper). Aletta Norval, drawing on the work of Bauman, has in fact described a crisis as the situation in which "the *horror of indetermination* has manifested itself", in which the dislocated ideology is "unable to determine the lines of inclusion and exclusion according to which the identity of the social is constituted" (Norval, 1994: 133). The lack of meaning produced by the dislocation of Francoist discourses opened such an undecidable space. The first words of Preston's book are highly suggestive in this respect (Preston, 1986: 1):

When Franco died on November 1975, few Spanish politicians of either right or left could have predicted with any precision the country's political development over the subsequent decade (...) There was hope, but not certainty

It was in this terrain of uncertainty where Asturian nationalist ideology emerged as one of the possible re-articulations that tried to escape from the encounter with the impossibility of attaining communitarian closure, revealed by the dislocation of Francoism. As a new myth seeking to suture "that dislocated space through the constitution of a new space of representation" (Laclau, 1990: 61). The moment of institution of this emerging Asturianist discourse will involve, in the other hand, a reference to an Other, since any attempt to construct an (Asturian) identity needs the externalisation and exclusion of the antagonist (Spanish) Other, via the construction of visible political frontiers. The emerging discourse will be mainly a particularistic discourse, which tries to create an Asturian National Identity. A new *Political Subjectivity*.

Since the end of the Cold War and the progressive collapse of the great narratives that divided the worlds into two opposing camps, Europe has witnessed the emergence of several collective actors. None of them seem to ground its legitimacy in a mission predetermined by universal history (class struggle or liberal democracy, for example), but in the defence of particularistic identities associated with concrete communities, such as nation-states, peripheral nations without states, ethnic groups, regions, cultural or religious minorities, etc. In this context, one of the main questions confronting us at the beginning of this century is: "what is the destiny of the universal in our societies?" (Laclau, 2000: 86). Is this proliferation of particularisms the only alternative? On the other hand, can we think of the possibility of launching new democratic projects that would be "compatible with the complex multiplicity of differences shaping the fabric of present-day societies?" (ibid.). Is it possible to envisage a society whose kernel remains as an empty surface (not defined by a certain sedimentation of the particular) facilitating the inscription and integration of all these concrete identities and demands?

While on the one hand, these particularistic demands can create the potential for "more expanded chains of equivalence [between different groups, identities, etc.] that in the past and, as a result, the possibility of more democratic societies"; on the other, and as Žižek warns us, particularism might also remain as pure particularism (Laclau, 2000b: 208-209). For the chain of equivalence to embrace a plurality of concrete demands, the ground of the equivalence cannot be based on the specificity/particularity of any of concrete demands. The anchoring point, the master signifier, should remain as an empty surface: as an empty signifier that, without a particular meaning, symbolises the absence of (and the impossibility of achieving) communitary fullness.

As pointed out by Ernesto Laclau: “The only democratic society is one which permanently shows the contingency of its own foundations – in our terms, permanently keeps open the gap between the ethical moment and the normative order” (2000: 86).

In this way, I always try to stress the contingency of the foundational moment, when I talk about the Asturian Nationalist Movement. It is my attempt to keep permanently open the moment of emptiness in which the society was an impossible object. Nationalists often identify this position with that of the enemy: 'what you're saying is that the Asturian Nation is false, aren't you?'. My argument, on the contrary, is the rejection of the choice between false and real. Is the (Asturian, Basque, English, Danish, etc.) nation false or real? I cannot but say: 'Yes, please!', as Groucho Marx said when asked 'Tea or coffee?'. In a recent conference that I gave in the XVIII Summer School of the Academy of the Asturian Letters (to a mainly nationalist audience), I ended by stressing that the 'legitimacy' of the vernacular Asturian language as central vehicle of communitarian identification rested neither in any essential characteristic of the language, nor in the fact that it was the traditional 'way of speaking', etc. That is to say, challenging the status of the (particularistic) Asturianist discourse as that of a (possible) normative order. Asturian Nationalism emerged, as a response to the dislocation of a previously sedimented reality, as a radical and contingent *decision*. On the contrary, those who won't admit that the Spanish, Basque, Catalan, Danish or British identities are also due to radical acts of political foundation – unfortunately – will be very close to Totalitarianism, even under the veil of the Western democratic institutions. For a society to be democratic "everything turns around the possibilities of keeping always open and ultimately undecided the moment of articulation between the particularity of the normative order and the universality of the ethical moment" (Laclau, 2000: 85). In other words, in our ability to elevate the constitutive emptiness to the centre of our democratic discourses.

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